

Can Religious People Be Lost?

by Casey Head

We live in a very religious society. Most people claim to be saved and on the road to heaven, even though they may never read their Bible or go to worship God. When confronted with the truth about denominationalism and false religion, an emotional battle begins to be waged in the minds of many Christians. After all, it is difficult to accept that sincere, religious people can be lost...especially when the ecumenical world that we live in says that ALL good people will be granted eternal life. Because this is such a hard subject for most Christians, let us search the scriptures for an answer.

The book of Jeremiah is often neglected because many view it as lengthy and overwhelmingly difficult. This book, however, is extremely encouraging and full of insight. In fact, it answers the above question- can religious people be lost?

Jeremiah was a young man who lived during the time of the divided kingdom. God sanctified him and gave him the task of preaching to the wicked nation of Israel. In punishing the people of Judah and Israel, God was sending them into Babylonian/Persian captivity for a period of seventy years. The Lord gave them opportunity to repent, however, and the young prophet Jeremiah was God's means of bringing this about. While God said of the Israelites in Jeremiah 1:16 that they had forsaken Him, we see in the following chapters that they were a very religious people.

In Jeremiah 26:1-2, God said to His prophet, "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, *which come to worship in the Lord's house*, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: if so be they will not hearken, *and turn every man from his evil way...*" We learn here that the Israelites DID worship God! They made it a point to come into the Lord's house, but their efforts were in vain. The Lord says again of the Jews in 14:12, "When they *fast*, I will not hear *their cry*; and when they *offer burnt offering and an oblation*, I will not accept them; He will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins." Not only were they worshiping in the Lord's house, but they were fasting and making offerings to God. Furthermore, they had prophets and priests, temples and high places! These people were very religious, yet they stood condemned before God.

In addition to being a very religious people, the Israelites felt right and secure in what they were doing. In Jeremiah 2:35, the Jews said, "Because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me...I have not sinned," and again in 16:10, "What is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord OUR GOD." As the prophet pleaded with them to repent of their evil, they responded by saying, "what evil?" After all, they did enter the Lord's house to "worship," and they did offer burnt offerings. They appeared religious and even holy, and they felt secure and innocent, yet they stood condemned before God.

Do you see the point? While people may appear religious and while they may devote their lives to some religious conviction, their salvation is not guaranteed. Appearances *and feelings* can be deceiving. In America, we may see a very religious nation where most people believe that they are on the road to heaven, but the book of Jeremiah tells us that an outwardly "righteous" nation can be inwardly wicked.

As we close, consider two additional passages. In Amos 5:21-22, God again tells the Israelites, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts." Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me, *ye that work iniquity.*" We must realize that religious people can be lost. Let us be careful that we are not among them!